

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It is the overall intent of the ***Design Review Guidelines*** to remove the mystery from the design review process and provide some measure of predictability for property owners and to ensure that Architectural Review Board decisions are objective and consistent for building and sign projects in the **Architectural Preservation District** and **Corridor Protection Districts**. In these ***Design Review Guidelines***, the Architectural Review Board has attempted to transcribe the design review and community preservation goals which have evolved over time since the City's architectural review program was first created in 1958 and are outlined in the 1998 Comprehensive Plan into a clearly legible and portable format.

The creation of ***Design Review Guidelines*** for the Architectural Review Board was recommended by the 1989 Comprehensive Plan and the 1991 Zoning Ordinance. The nature of the guidelines follows the directive of the Architectural Review Article of the 1991 Zoning Ordinance to enhance the quality of life for all by preserving the character and desirable aesthetic features of the City and ensuring that new development is compatible with these areas and features. As with all land use controls, the purpose of the Architectural Review Board is to review individual building and signage projects in the City to ensure that the property values of the whole neighborhood and commercial area are protected. The special character-defining features of the City were identified schematically in the Comprehensive Plan and specifically in the 1992 Architectural Survey report. The Comprehensive Plan recommended that an inventory and assessment of the characteristics of these areas and features be undertaken and that the results be used to guide and assist in the development of ***Design Review Guidelines*** for the Architectural Review Board.

Buildings and neighborhoods listed on or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, and other buildings 50 years old or older, are designated on individual lists (Appendix 6 and Appendix 7). These lists are based on a 1992 survey performed by Frazier and Associates of all buildings 50 years old or older in the City. Based on National Register criteria Frazier and Associates recommended potential individual buildings and neighborhoods that would qualify as historic districts on the National Register of Historic Places. The purpose of the inventory of buildings and neighborhoods listed on or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places is not necessarily to mandate preservation and protection of the listed property, but to alert the Architectural Review Board to the fact that the property has some significance in defining the City's character and in representing architectural styles and cultural periods from the City's past, and, in particular, that the property contributes to the character of the neighborhood and surrounding area. When the ARB reviews development proposals for the site of a listed property or a property in the vicinity of listed properties, the ARB considers the character of the property, the role it plays in the surrounding area, and the value of preservation of the resource, and weighs it against the current state of the property and the surrounding area and the proposal for alteration or redevelopment of the site. If the property in its current state has lost much of

the integrity which made it significant, or contributory, and if the proposed new development would improve the character of the surrounding area, the ARB may decide that alteration or redevelopment of the site would be appropriate and perhaps preferable to retaining the building in its present state or in a restored state. Another purpose of the Listing is to alert the ARB that when it is determined that a listed property cannot be retained in the face of present development patterns, that it should be documented prior to removal or dramatic alteration.

As recommended by the Comprehensive Plan, the guidelines are compatible with the Secretary of the Interior's *Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings* and follow precedent set by the State and other communities which use the Secretary's *Standards* as the basis for their preservation programs and local design review guidelines.

During the process of drafting the ***Design Review Guidelines***, the Architectural Review Board and the Planning Department have received comments from the public suggesting that some property owners in the City are confused about the design review process in Williamsburg and are unaware of the precedent for such a program. The following section briefly outlines the chronological development of design review in the Country and the current state of preservation planning in Virginia.

The first comprehensive preservation ordinance in the Country was enacted by Charleston, South Carolina, in 1931. On the federal level, Congress passed the Historic Sites Act in 1935, advocating historic preservation as a national policy for federal agencies. The current national preservation program was enacted into law as the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, with subsequent amendments. The first preservation law in Virginia was enacted by the City of Alexandria in 1946. Virginia State enabling legislation for historic preservation was enacted in 1950, with subsequent amendments.

The City of Williamsburg first adopted a preservation ordinance in 1947 when the Colonial Williamsburg Historic Area was adopted as an overlay-zoning district, requiring all reconstruction projects and land uses to be reviewed by the Board of Zoning Appeals on a case-by-case basis. In 1958, the City adopted a comprehensive architectural review ordinance for the entire City, which established Williamsburg's first architectural review board. The current Architectural Review Article of the 1991 Zoning Ordinance is in line with the State Code and is modeled on several ordinances in effect in Virginia.

According to the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, by 1957, approximately 11 communities in the Country had enacted preservation ordinances. With ordinances dating from 1947 and 1958 the City of Williamsburg was among the top three localities in Virginia, with Alexandria and Richmond, and one of the earliest communities in the Country to adopt a comprehensive architectural review ordinance as a means of promoting general welfare.

As of 2005, there are 55 architectural review boards in Virginia reviewing building projects in over 180 historic districts. The perception that location in architectural review districts decreases property values, espoused by some property owners, is refuted by the experience of such cities as Alexandria, Fredericksburg, and Richmond, to name a few. Studies have shown that property values in the historic districts have increased substantially since designation and that the rise in property values in the historic districts has outstripped the growth of property values outside the districts by huge margins. In addition, historic districts around Virginia attract tourism, and the resulting business and tax income for the locality and State, and attract new property owners and reinvestment tax income to the host community. When a community becomes a more attractive place to visit, to live and to do business, the value of real property rises and the quality of life for all is enhanced. By designating architectural review districts to ensure that the community's special character is preserved and enhanced, the City of Williamsburg supports the efforts of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation to create and maintain a superior environment for the Historic Area and reinforces a commitment to attract and retain visitors, residents, businesses, and the resulting income to our community.

The Architectural Review Board will continue to review new materials on a regular basis. New materials may be presented to the Board during any regular meeting, and should include a sample of the material and the manufacturer's specifications for the material. If the Board determines that the ***Design Review Guidelines*** should be amended to include the new material, the Board may initiate an amendment to the Guidelines in accord with Article IX, Architectural Review, Section 21-853(h) of the Zoning Ordinance.